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FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL  
TO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 7631  
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA PRIORITY 2353  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8093  
INFO RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

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SUBJECT: MAY DAY 2008: POLICE DISPERSE DEMONSTRATORS,  
PREVENT ON MARCH ON TAKSIM

REF: A. ISTANBUL 207

[B](#). 2006 ISTANBUL 363

[C](#). ANKARA 730

[1](#)1. (U) The Istanbul police were out force to prevent pro-labor demonstrators from marching to Taksim Square for an unauthorized May Day rally. Union supporters originally intended to defy Istanbul Governor Guler's ban on the march (ref A), yet turned back after clashing with police. Suleyman Celebi, Chairman of the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Union (DISK), called off the march citing "common sense" as his reason.

[1](#)2. (U) City authorities were better prepared for this year's May Day demonstrations, seeking to avoid the violence and massive traffic disruptions that caught many off guard one year ago (ref B). Thousands of police were positioned around Taksim Square, blocking all roads into the historic square. Police quickly reacted to the unsanctioned march, using water cannon and tear gas to disperse the crowd. By mid-afternoon 505 people had been arrested and 6 police officers had been injured.

[1](#)3. (U) In addition to the attempted march on Taksim, tens of thousands of labor supporters demonstrated at three authorized locations in Istanbul. Relatively peaceful rallies occurred in areas in the Zeytinburnu, Kadikoy, and Caglayan districts where rallies and marches are typically held. Guler also reportedly agreed to permit labor union leaders to lay a wreath at Taksim square. Due to conflicts between labor leaders and police at the scene the wreath laying did not take place.

[1](#)4. (U) Tensions over the May Day rally this year were high in part due to the recent passage of a Social Security reform law (ref C) that will reduce some worker benefits including significantly raising the retirement age. A sharp exchange between union leaders and government officials, including the Prime Minister, also served to raise expectations of a confrontation.

[1](#)5. (U) Comment. May Day 2008 was not a repeat of the violent, chaotic events of 2007 as many had feared. Better planning and greater outreach on the part of municipal transit and police authorities enabled local residents to work around illegal protests -- that although disruptive, were not out of the realm of the expected by Turkish standards. End Comment.

WIENER